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ABSTRACT

This informational book on marijuana is part of a series of three interactive books on tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana; three informational books containing parallel content; and three teacher guides designed to give students in grades five through eight practice in using the information and skills presented in the books. The goal of this book and the accompanying interactive book and teacher guide is to prevent marijuana use by preadolescents. This book provides information about the effect of marijuana on the body and about health problems that may result from using this drug. It describes what a drug is, considers prescription and other drugs, explains what marijuana is, and looks at illegal drugs and their use. Health problems resulting from marijuana use are described and examples are given of how some young people begin to use marijuana. It notes that most teenagers do not use marijuana and reminds students that the decision to use marijuana is their choice to make. (NB)

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Marijuana: The Real Story

David R. Stronck

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This book gives real answers to your questions about marijuana...and more

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MARIJUANA: The Real Story

David R. Stronck

Illustrated by Robert Ransom

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WHAT IS A DRUG?

A drug is a substance that changes the way the body feels or works. Many people use drugs as medicines some time in their lives. Most medicine cabinets contain aspirin or some other drug that stops pain. There may be something for stomachaches. Some pills help people fall asleep. For people with allergies, there are pills to stop coughing and sneezing.

These medicines are legal drugs. Anyone can buy them in a drug or grocery store. Can you name some of the medicines kept in your home?

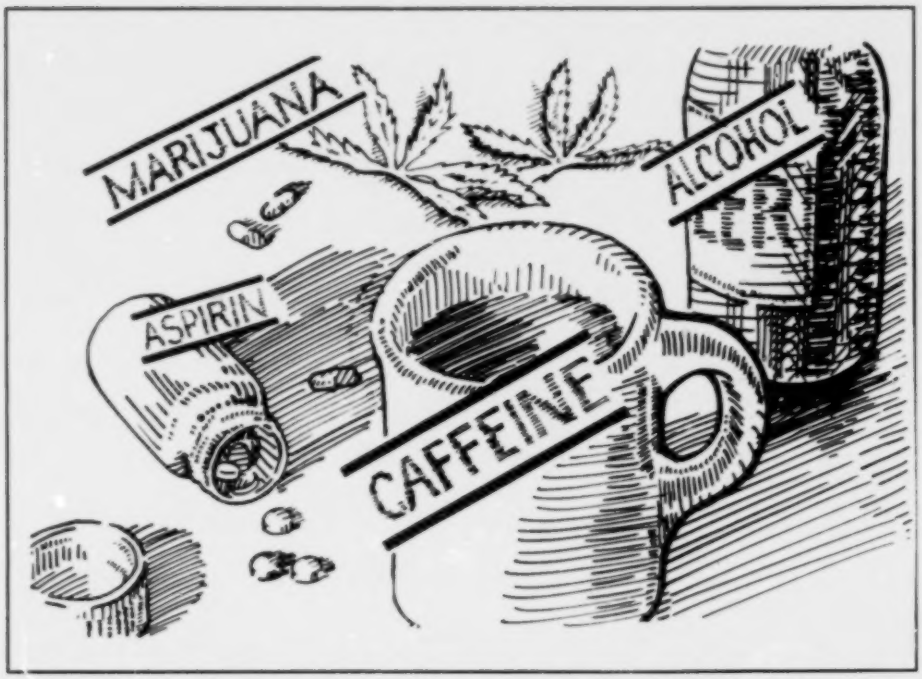
PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Doctors can prescribe other drugs. Some stop pain when a person is badly hurt. Others put people to sleep when they need to have an operation. These are very powerful drugs. Our laws allow their use only with a doctor's order. Doctors know exactly the right amount of these medicines a person can take safely depending on their weight, age and health. Large amounts

of these drugs can make a person sick or even kill them.

OTHER DRUGS

Some drugs change feelings or moods. Almost all Americans take the drug caffeine, sometimes without realizing it. Coffee, tea and most cola drinks contain caffeine. Caffeine makes the



A drug is a substance that changes the way the body feels or works.

heart beat faster. It also makes some people more awake and nervous.

The same feelings can come from the drug nicotine found in tobacco. Doctors know that nicotine can cause heart attacks, cancer and other health problems. Most people know that nicotine is a drug but do not think about caffeine as a drug. Both caffeine and nicotine are drugs.

Alcohol is another drug. Many people take this drug in drinks such as beer, wine and whiskey. Alcohol makes the heart beat slower; it slows down the body. Caffeine and nicotine speed it up.

As you can see, drugs change the way the body works. So people who sell drugs or buy them need to know how they change the body—and if they are safe.

Laws forbid selling or serving tobacco products or alcohol to young people. Why are they legal for adults but illegal for young people? People

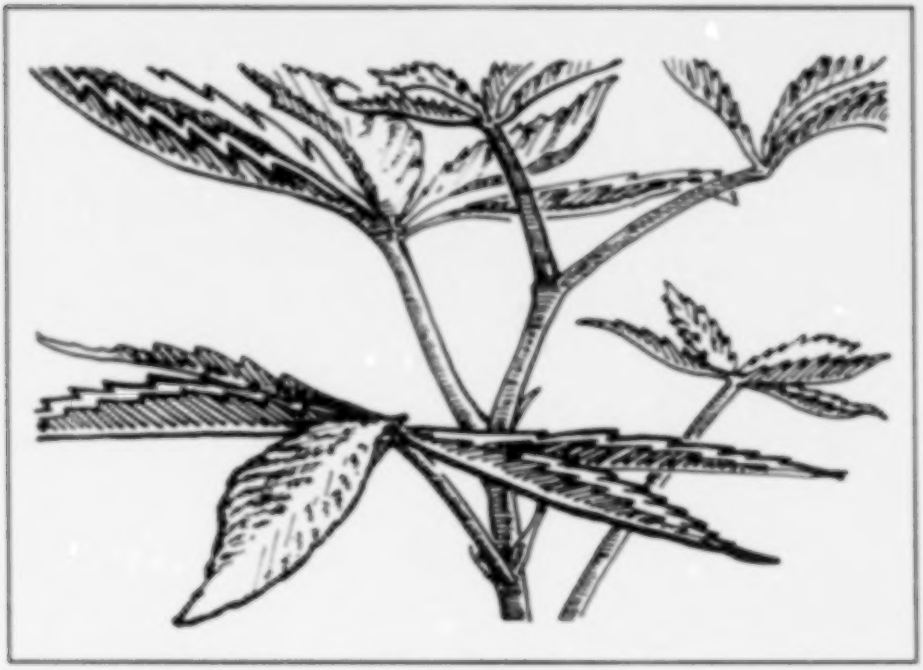
who make laws believe adults will use these drugs in small amounts that will not cause health or mental problems. Do you think all adults make wise decisions about drugs?

Some drugs are against the law for people of any age. Marijuana is the most common of these illegal drugs.

WHAT IS MARIJUANA?

Marijuana is also called "pot" from a Spanish word for the hemp plant. The leaves or flowers of the hemp plant are rolled into cigarettes and smoked. Marijuana can also be eaten in food or smoked in a pipe.

A person who uses marijuana becomes "stoned." Someone who is stoned may feel very relaxed. Their mind moves quickly from one thing to another, making it hard for them to think clearly. They may talk a lot, but their speech seems confused to someone who is not stoned. A person who uses marijuana can't remember things well.



Marijuana comes from the hemp plant.

Not everyone who uses marijuana feels the same. Marijuana may cause fear, panic or anger. The person may see things that aren't real (called hallucinations), or feel out of control. There may be a fear of being attacked by everyone. One young man thought all the cars were chasing him.

Marijuana is illegal. This means there are laws that forbid people to buy, sell or use it. Other

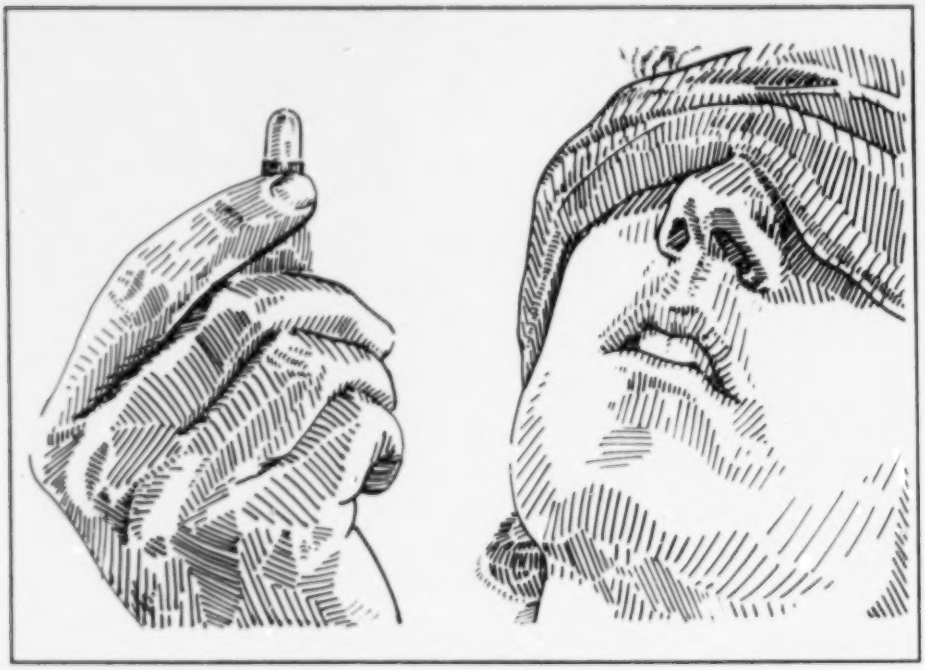
illegal drugs are cocaine, PCP and heroin. People caught with these drugs may have to pay a fine or go to jail.

ILLEGAL DRUGS

Getting into trouble with police, parents and school is enough to keep most young people from using illegal drugs. Here are some other reasons not to use them:

- There is no way to know if an illegal drug is safe. Before a drug can become legal a government agency called the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) tests it. No one tests an illegal drug. So there is no way of knowing what damage the drug can do to the body.

- There is no way to know how strong an illegal drug is. Marijuana is about ten times stronger today than it was ten years ago. Remember that doctors very carefully decide how much of a strong drug is safe for a person to take. No one decides how much marijuana is safe to take.



There is no way to know if an illegal drug is safe to use.

- There is no way to know what is in an illegal drug. For instance, to make marijuana seem stronger some sellers add a very dangerous illegal drug called PCP or "angel dust." No one knows how PCP works or what reaction a person will have to it. Someone might take PCP and notice nothing. The next time, PCP might seriously damage the same person's brain. PCP can cause people to hallucinate, become violent or hurt other people or themselves.

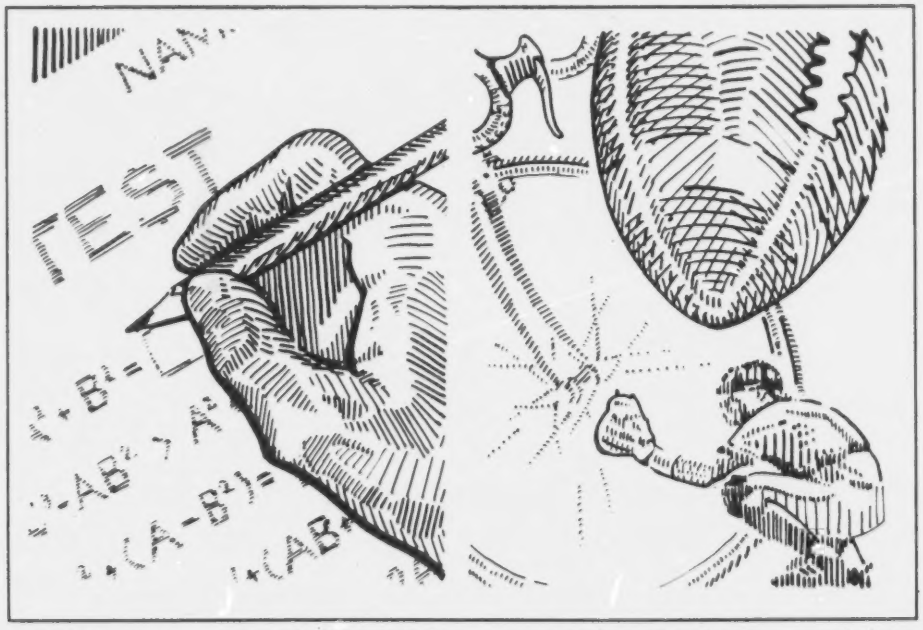
- Marijuana can keep the body from protecting itself. Too much alcohol makes many people vomit. This is the body's way of eliminating poisons that are hurting it. Marijuana stops the body from vomiting. Some young people have died because they drank too much alcohol and smoked marijuana at the same time. Their bodies could not get rid of the alcohol quickly enough and it killed them.

- Marijuana stays in the body several days after the person has used it. Marijuana doesn't make the user sick the next day like alcohol can do. Instead, the person can't judge distances well or pay close attention to what he or she is doing. Driving a car, taking a test or participating in a sport is harder for several days after using marijuana.

- Using one harmful drug may lead to using others. In 1982 more than two thousand sixth-graders answered a questionnaire about drugs. One in ten of these young people smoked tobacco. Of those who smoked tobacco, two-

thirds had tried marijuana. Almost none of the nonsmokers had tried marijuana.

- Many people think marijuana is harmless. Before 1930 people thought cigarette smoking was harmless. Many doctors even smoked cigarettes. By 1964 we began to know about the dangers of tobacco.



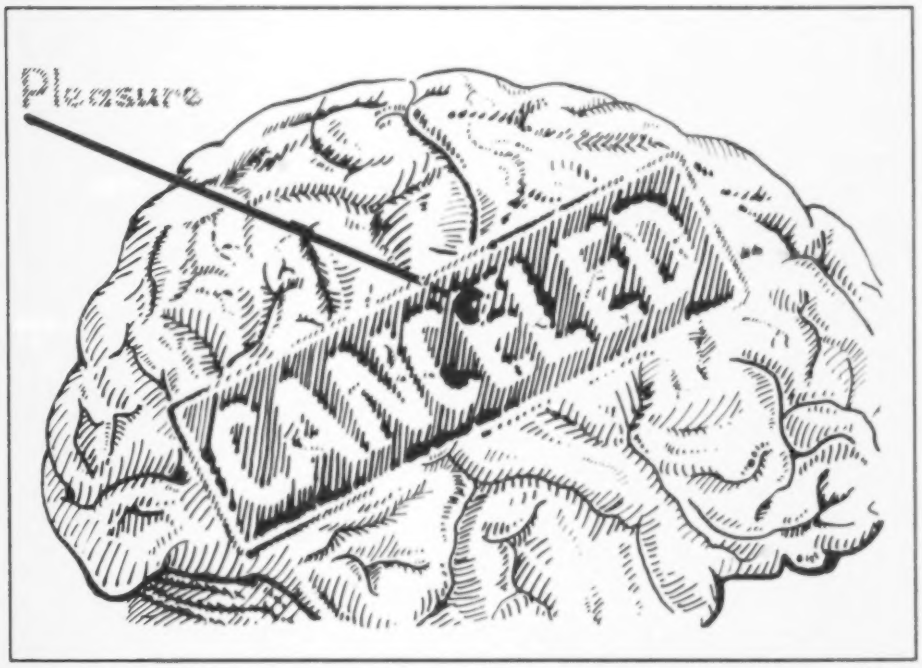
Taking a test or participating in a sport is harder for several days after using marijuana.

Smoking marijuana will not suddenly kill anyone or even make the person feel sick the next day. So it doesn't *seem* dangerous. But scientists are finding many serious health problems are connected to marijuana. Studies with animals and humans show that marijuana is as dangerous as tobacco.

HEALTH PROBLEMS FROM MARIJUANA

The daily use of large amounts of marijuana can cause some of the following problems to the human brain, lungs, heart, blood and other areas of the body:

- Marijuana makes the user feel happy for a short time. It does this by upsetting the pleasure centers of the brain. Much use of marijuana over many years can destroy most of these pleasure centers. These people are very dull and don't seem to enjoy anything. Their brain is like that of a sad old person who is easily upset. They no longer have the same personality.



Use of marijuana over many years can destroy most of the pleasure centers in the brain.

Marijuana can greatly change some young people in only a few months. They may drop out of school. They may lose interest in their families and friends. They no longer care about anything except using marijuana.

- Almost every child in school knows how harmful cigarette smoking can be. Tobacco can cause cancer and other diseases. Tobacco smoke

contains tars, the drug nicotine and other chemicals that harm the lungs.

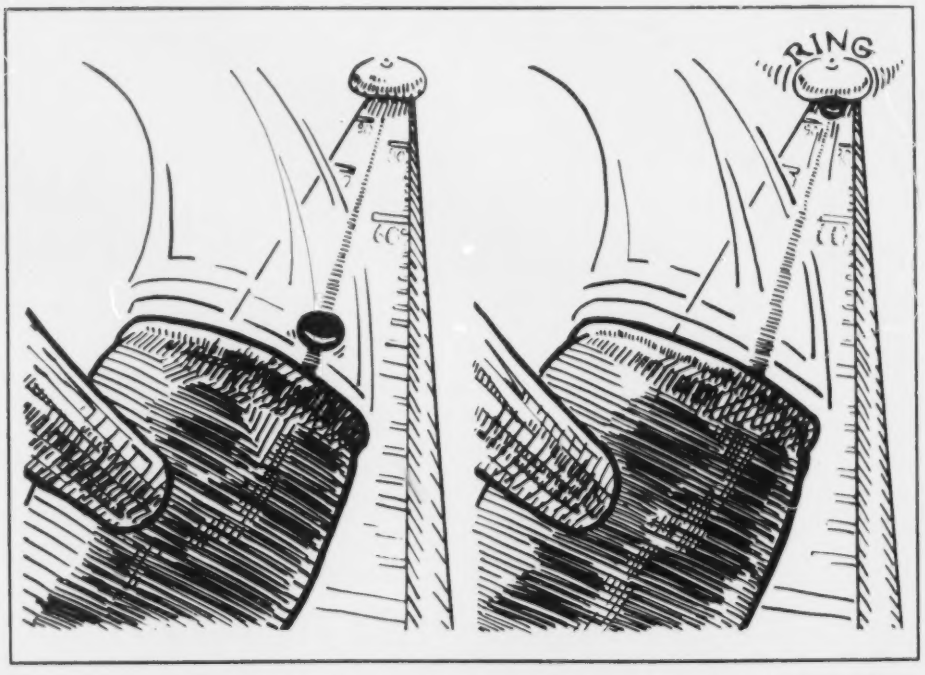
Marijuana smoke may be even more harmful to the lungs than tobacco smoke. Marijuana smoke contains tars, the drug THC and other chemicals that harm the lungs. Chances of getting lung cancer from smoking marijuana are even higher than the risks of getting lung cancer from smoking tobacco. Smoking both tobacco and marijuana does more harm to the lungs than smoking only one or the other.

- Smoking can cause a lung disease called emphysema. Parts of the lungs of a person with emphysema are destroyed and the person can no longer breathe well. Tobacco smokers sometimes die of emphysema. Marijuana smokers seem to get the disease more quickly than tobacco smokers do.

- Tobacco causes people to have heart disease and sometimes to die from heart attacks. Marijuana smoking also causes heart attacks. A few

puffs on a marijuana cigarette make the heart beat much faster. Marijuana smoke is about twice as strong as tobacco smoke. The effects of marijuana last much longer than those of tobacco.

People who smoke marijuana often complain about chest pains. These pains are the first sign that marijuana is hurting the heart. If the person



Marijuana smoke is about twice as strong as tobacco smoke.

stops smoking early enough, the pains will go away.

- The human body makes white blood cells to fight disease and destroy germs. Marijuana causes the body to make fewer white blood cells. So marijuana smokers get sick more often.

- Pregnant women who smoke marijuana may have smaller babies, or babies with heart diseases or nervous problems.

WHY DO SOME YOUNG PEOPLE START SMOKING MARIJUANA?

Here are examples of how some young people began to use marijuana:

- *Jamie knows almost nothing about marijuana. One day he is smoking a tobacco cigarette with his friend Scott. Scott gives him a marijuana cigarette he got from his older brother. "Smoke this," he says to Jamie. "It won't hurt you. It's more fun than smoking tobacco." Jamie takes a*

few puffs from the marijuana cigarette. He feels confused and silly. What should he do?

Would Jamie have smoked the marijuana if he had better information about what marijuana does? Did smoking tobacco cigarettes make it easier for him to say yes to marijuana? How do you think he could have said no without hurting Scott's feelings? Where can people your age find out the facts about marijuana?

❒ *Emily looks older than her age. Many of her friends are older than she is. At a beach party, some of her friends are smoking marijuana. Everyone in this group thinks their parents and the police are dumb and there's nothing wrong with smoking marijuana. They pass around a pipe filled with marijuana.*

It seems to Emily that she must smoke the marijuana to be part of this group. Everyone looks relaxed and happy. She wants to join in the fun. Emily smokes the pipe. At first she feels nothing. But after the pipe has been passed

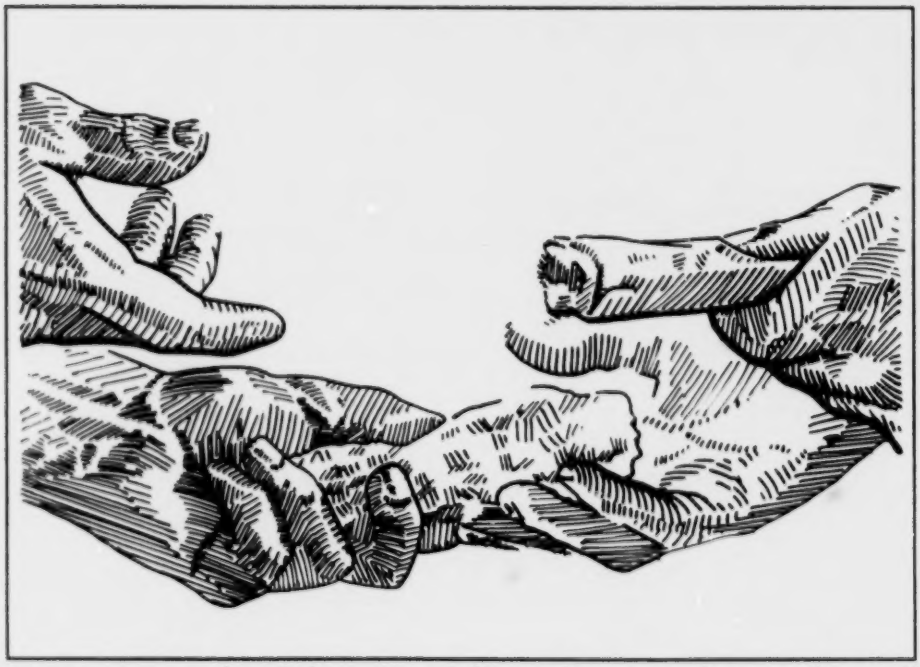
around several times she doesn't feel like herself. Things seem very far away and she can't think clearly. She begins to feel afraid and nervous. What should she do?

Why did Emily smoke the pipe? Can you think of ways Emily could have stayed in the group without smoking marijuana? What would happen if the police arrived? What would your parents do about such smoking?

❐ *Zachary is curious about drugs. He knows some people who have tried marijuana and he wants to know what it feels like to smoke it. He drank some wine one time and he felt good before it made him sick and he began vomiting. Someone told him that marijuana doesn't make you sick. Zachary buys some marijuana from Tim, an older classmate. They go to Tim's house when his parents aren't at home. Tim shows Zachary how to smoke. Zachary begins to feel funny and afraid.*

What are some of the things that could happen to Zachary? Does your school have any policies about students who sell marijuana? Is there a better way Zachary could have satisfied his curiosity about how it felt to use marijuana?

❒ *Maria has always been an excellent student. When her parents divorce, she is upset. It's hard for her to pay attention in school because she*



Does your school have a policy about students who sell marijuana to other students?

keeps thinking about her family. Her friend Sara offers her a marijuana cigarette. She says the marijuana will make Maria forget her problems.

Maria smokes the marijuana. She feels relaxed and happy. She begins smoking a little marijuana each night. Soon she is forgetting many things, even her homework. Her teacher is worried about Maria and asks her what the trouble is.

What should Maria do? Do you know of an adult you can tell about your problems, even when you are breaking the rules? Do you think that trying to forget about a problem will make it go away? What are some other things Maria could have done instead of smoking marijuana?

Teenagers who drop out of school often smoke marijuana. Did they drop out of school first and then begin smoking marijuana because they were bored? Or did they start smoking marijuana and become bored with school? The two seem to go together.

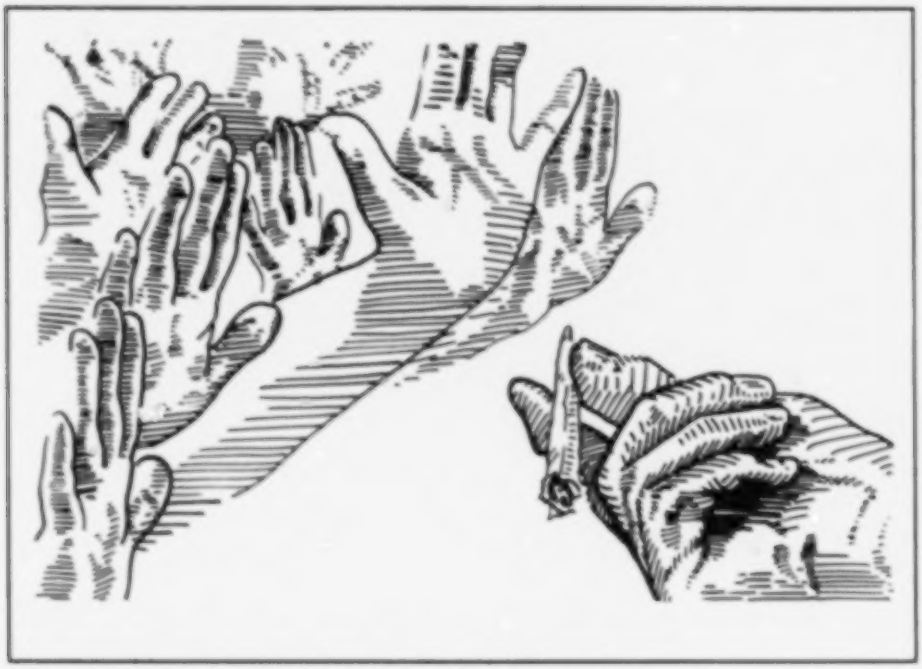
MOST TEENAGERS DON'T SMOKE MARIJUANA

Even though you may know some people who smoke marijuana, most young people don't. Here are some examples of young people who chose not to start using marijuana:

- Brian likes to play baseball. He has a great pitching record in his league. He wants to play major league baseball when he gets older. Brian is not interested in marijuana, tobacco or alcohol. He knows drugs will hurt his ability to play ball.

- Amy's mother is a doctor. She tells Amy what she knows about marijuana and other drugs. Amy has decided not to use marijuana. She wants to do well in school so she can go to college and she knows using marijuana can make studying harder.

  Amy spends the night with her friend Gwen. Gwen's parents go out for the evening and Gwen offers Amy some marijuana. Amy is



Most young people don't smoke marijuana.

curious about many things. Also she doesn't want to hurt her friend's feelings. But she refuses the marijuana. Gwen smokes the marijuana and tries to get Amy to change her mind. But Amy is sure about her decision. She made it before the question came up. She is able to have fun with Gwen without using marijuana.

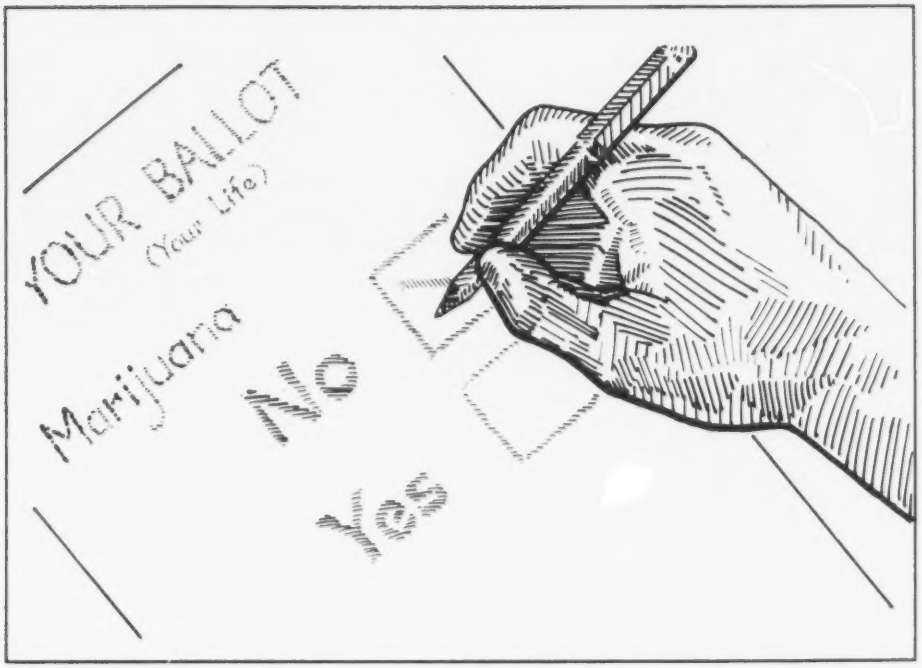
- A group of girls in Yolanda's school smoke marijuana. They make bad grades and are often in

trouble. One girl was expelled because she was caught smoking. Another is absent a lot and is thinking about dropping out. Yolanda knows that the teenager who lives next door to her sells marijuana to these girls. Yolanda's choices have been different from the girls in the group or the one who sells marijuana. She likes school. Her friends also enjoy school and are thinking about what kinds of careers they will have when they are adults. Drugs are not part of their lives.

- Jason's father is a police officer. He talks with Jason about people who break the law and what happens to them. "Why would anyone break the law?" he asks Jason. "Laws are to protect people." Jason agrees with his father. He is proud of his dad and respects the law and the work of the police. He promises his father he will not use illegal drugs.

- Heather doesn't like to be out of control. She likes to know very clearly what she is doing and what others are doing. She tried alcohol once. The feeling of being a little drunk was not fun for

her. At a party with older teenagers, she smokes marijuana. It makes her talk a lot and she keeps forgetting what she is going to say before she finishes saying it. The next day she has a hard time paying attention in her classes. She doesn't do well on a surprise quiz in math, her favorite subject. Heather decides not to use marijuana again.



Making choices gives you control over your life.

YOUR CHOICE

After reading this booklet, do you know more about marijuana than you did before? Have you thought about what you might want to do? Studying the facts and then deciding what's best for you is good practice for being a mature adult. Many young people haven't learned to make real choices about what happens to them. Remember that making choices gives you control over your life. What happens to people who just drift along and let others decide for them? Think about it. It's your life. What happens to your body is up to you.

About this Book

MARIJUANA: The Real Story is part of an important new series of books designed to help young people make informed, responsible decisions about drug use. Other books in the series include *TOBACCO: The Real Story* and *ALCOHOL: The Real Story*.

The development of these books was supported by funds from the National Institute of Child Health and Development. They have gone through extensive testing with preadolescents and have been carefully reviewed by substance abuse professionals. The committee of professionals not only gave initial input to determine appropriate content, but also reviewed the books during development.

The series provides young people with critical information about substance abuse, and prepares them to deal with social situations in which they are most likely to encounter marijuana, alcohol and tobacco.

About the Author

Author David R. Stronck, PhD, is professor of science education at California State University at Hayward. He has extensive experience writing school texts and has published numerous articles in scholarly journals. He has been the editor of the *California Science Teacher's Journal* and serves as a consultant to school districts.

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Also available as part of this series are three interactive fiction books. *Serena's Secret, Danny's Dilemma* and *Christy's Chance* combine substance abuse information and models for resisting peer pressure in the popular interactive adventure book format. The characters in these interactive books are presented with choices about drug use. The reader makes a decision for the character, turns to the appropriate page and learns the consequences of that particular choice. One interactive story can be reread many times. Each time the story is different depending on the reader's choices.

LEARN THE REAL STORY ABOUT MARIJUANA

This book tells you the facts about marijuana. Many young people don't really make a choice about using marijuana. They let others tell them what to do. MARIJUANA: *The Real Story* gives you the information you need to make **your own** decision.

What are the different kinds of drugs?
What is marijuana?
Why is marijuana illegal?
What health problems does marijuana cause?
Why do some teenagers smoke marijuana?
How can you say no to marijuana?

It's your life! Be sure you're the one who's in charge of it.

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